

Solano County Veterans' Buildings

2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury Report

Reason for Investigation

Under the authority of California Penal Code §925, the 2006-2007 Grand Jury elected to determine the current status of all Veterans' buildings in the County.

Grand Jury Actions

- Toured all County Veterans' buildings
- Interviewed Veterans' Building Managers
- Interviewed Veterans
- Reviewed current Veterans' building management agreements
- Reviewed Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Interviewed County Facilities Personnel

Background / Summary

At the onset of the 2006-2007 Grand Jury, the status of all Veterans' buildings in the County was unknown. This investigation spotlights the continuous efforts to ease problems regarding financial responsibilities between the County and the Veterans' organizations. During the month of September 2006, the Grand Jury toured the county Veterans' buildings and determined that four of the six buildings were well maintained. Building managers pointed out improvements came about through a combination of pride, responsibility and ever improving teamwork between the County and veterans' organizations.

In accordance with California Military and Veterans Code §262, County General Services provide veteran facilities free of charge to the various veteran organizations. Building management agreements are in place with all building managers. The agreements are not leases due to the fact that the veteran organizations are not charged rent or fees for the use of the buildings. The maintenance for veteran building is included in the overall county maintenance budget.

Although many of these buildings hold historical significance to their respective cities, they are not listed as official historical landmarks.

On January 11, 2005, the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was formed to provide a forum for military personnel and veterans to address their unique issues. The purpose of the Committee includes improving operations and maintenance of our County's Veterans' buildings.

Building entrances, restroom facilities and multi-level accessibility are the main issues. The County has an ADA transition plan in effect that will cover these deficiencies by the end of the 2007-2008 Fiscal Year. With respect to access, only the Vallejo building is in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).

During the visits, the Grand Jury observed the following:

Benicia – Located at 1150 First Street, this building was built in 1948 on city owned property and currently serves a dual role as a veteran’s hall and a city community center. This building is rented out to the public for private and city sponsored functions. Veterans’ organizations perform general maintenance on a frequent basis. The lower part of the second story windows open with no safety protection to prevent a person from falling two stories to the parking lot below. The bottoms of the windows are 36 inches from the floor. A window replacement project targeted for the upstairs main social hall, overlooking the parking lot, is not complete. Entry, restroom and activity level access are not compliant with the ADA. The ceiling tiles in the upper floor are warped, cracked and stained caused by leaks in the roof. The roof has since been repaired.

Finding 1 – Due to the low height and lack of safety restraints, the second story windows create a safety hazard.

Recommendation 1 – The County should expedite this repair.

Finding 2 – The ceiling tiles in the upper floor are warped, cracked and stained.

Recommendation 2 – The County should replace the tiles.

Dixon – Located on 231 North First Street, this building was built in 1928. This is a two-story facility with stair only access to the second floor. The condition of the second floor makes it unsuitable for group activities; therefore it is currently used as a storage area. The floors are weak and warped in this area. There is mold formation attributed to water damage throughout the building, most heavily concentrated along the east side of the building. The entrance is ADA compliant; however the adjacent restrooms are not.

The city of Dixon is interested in financially contributing to the upgrade of the Veterans’ building and has funded a \$30,000 study to evaluate code compliance and determine the cost of restoration needed to fit in to Dixon's main street program. Attempts to upgrade the facility have proven to be expensive and unsuccessful. At the time of the study restoration costs were \$1.4 million. They have since increased to between \$2.9 million and \$3.4 million according to County facilities staff. The city has committed \$300,000 to the restoration project. A decision has not been made regarding project preference and negotiations continue among the County, City and the Veterans’ organizations.

Finding 1 – No decision regarding the restoration or replacement of this building has been made.

Recommendation 1 – A decision regarding the fate of this building should be made in a timely manner.

Rio Vista – Located at 610 St. Francis Street and built in 1970, this Veterans’ building represents an example of what can happen through open communication with the County and self initiative by the Veterans’ organizations. There are some ADA issues. The main entrance is not wheelchair accessible. Restrooms can not accommodate wheelchairs. There were leaks in the roof which the county repaired.

The various Veterans' organizations initiated landscaping projects that enhance the curb appeal. An automatic irrigation system has been revamped in the front and plans are underway to improve the irrigation systems at the rear of the building. The Veterans' organizations also purchased a new commercial stove, eliminating a major safety hazard.

Finding 1 – The main entrance is not wheelchair accessible.

Recommendation 1 – Coordinated efforts should be used to produce an ADA compliant ramp.

Finding 2 – Rio Vista Veterans' organizations should be congratulated on their initiative to upgrade and maintain their facility.

Recommendation 2 – Keep up the good work.

Suisun City – Located at 427 Main Street and built in 1929, this building began as the County library. It was renovated in 1980. One of the upstairs areas is rented to a ballet school. There are several uncompleted maintenance projects that need immediate attention. Repairs are needed on the tiles in the great room, the ceiling in the kitchen leaks from holes in the roof, electrical outlets need to be grounded and water fountains are out of order. The elevator is a safety hazard and in need of repairs. At the time of our visit, no current elevator safety certification was posted and it apparently had not been inspected since 2004. Gutters on the roof have been connected to the down spouts, but the downspouts are not connected to the existing drains. It was brought to our attention at the time of our visit, that the facility did not have an enclosed dumpster, which is required by state regulations. County representatives indicated that this issue has been addressed and will be completed soon.

Finding 1 – The elevator does not work properly and is out of inspection compliance.

Recommendation 1 – The elevators should be inspected, repaired and certified safe to operate.

Finding 2 – The building does not have an enclosed dumpster.

Recommendation 2 – The County and the Veteran's organization should take the steps necessary to correct this compliance issue.

Vacaville – Located at 549 Merchant Street and built in 1935, this building was remodeled in 1991. The Veterans have maintained this building through active community and Veterans group participation. When called upon, the County has been helpful. This building is ADA compliant.

Finding 1 – The Vacaville Veterans' organizations are to be commended for their on-going efforts at maintaining and operating this community oriented asset.

Recommendation 1 – Keep up the good work.

Vallejo – Located at 420 Admiral Callaghan Lane, this building was funded and constructed by members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 550 in the 1940's. In December of 2005, the county purchased Veterans' Post 550 to replace the condemned Vallejo Veterans' Hall. This building is ADA compliant.

The building currently serves eight different Veterans' organizations. After the purchase, improvements were made. Air conditioners located on the roof were refurbished and the cement walk way leading up to and in front of the entry was replaced. An enclosed entryway in front of the main door was removed. A security camera in front of the building was lost, stolen or removed. Overgrown foliage was removed by the Veterans contracted gardening service, which made the area safer and improved drainage of the area.

Finding 1 – The security camera that was in front of the building is missing.

Recommendation 1 – The County should replace the security camera.

Comments

With the exception of Vacaville and Vallejo, the buildings are not ADA compliant. County Services has indicated that the ADA upgrades are part of a five-year ADA transition plan. This is the fifth year of that plan.

Several of the Veterans' facilities appear to be out of code compliance and need immediate attention. All buildings have current building maintenance agreements in place with the County.

Communication between the County and building managers should continue. The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee meetings provide an ideal forum for this communication.

County facility personnel do not perform routine inspections on any County buildings to determine maintenance, repairs, or any necessary improvements, but are available to provide inspections upon request.

Affected Agencies

- Solano County Board of Supervisors
- Solano County General Services

Courtesy Copies

- Veterans' Building Manager, Benicia
- Veterans' Building Manager, Dixon
- Veterans' Building Manager, Rio Vista
- Veterans' Building Manager, Suisun City
- Veterans' Building Manager, Vacaville
- Veterans' Building Manager, Vallejo